



Lucerne

What is it?

Legume pasture plant

Why is it a good option?

High yielding, high protein perennial (7-10 years if well looked after), deep rooting, fixes nitrogen in the soil

What it likes

Does best when sown (direct drilled) in spring in highly fertile, free-draining soil (pH 6.0+), in areas with rainfall lower than 1200mm per year

What it doesn't like

Too much rainfall and wet soils, which leads to disease and poor production

What is it used for?

Can be grazed, also makes high-quality nutritional hay (goats, horses) or silage (cattle, sheep) for use during dry summers and in winter

Read more: growing lucerne for poultry, see page 54



THERE'S NOT much happening at the moment weed-wise. Instead, I thought I'd recommend an alternative grazing and/or cutting crop to sow this spring, rather than the typical ryegrass and clover.

Lucerne (also known as alfalfa) is a grazing and cutting crop, grown on about 45 million hectares worldwide. It's believed to be the oldest plant grown for livestock, dating back about 3300 years. That's because it's a reliable, deep-rooted legume that provides a high yield of quality feed, even in dry weather and soil conditions.

7 reasons to sow lucerne

If you're planning to sow new pasture this spring, consider lucerne if you have good growing conditions.

- **a good** crop of lucerne averages a cumulative dry matter yield of 15-22TDM/Ha per year as a multi-cut, multi-graze crop. A mix of ryegrass/clover can yield 6.6-10TDM/Ha in a dry year, and an average of 14 TDM on NZ dairy farms;
- **lucerne** is drought tolerant thanks to its deep roots which allow it to access water and nutrients beyond the roots of most other pasture plants;
- **it** increases soil nitrogen (N) and organic matter, enhancing soil structure and fertility;
- **it** can be used for on-farm grazing, and silage or hay, fetching a good price if sold;
- **produces** green feed for much of the year;
- **average** productive life of 5-7 years (up to 7-10 in the right conditions);
- **excellent** feed quality, 27% protein (vs 18% for ryegrass).

Talk to an advisor at your local rural supplies store or seed suppliers such as GT Pioneer or PGG Wrightson Seeds.



About Gary

Gary Bosley works as PGG Wrightson's North Island technical specialist in agronomy. He and his family live on a 4ha lifestyle block south-east of Auckland. PGG Wrightson Ltd (PGW) does not warrant the information's accuracy, quality, outcome or fitness for any purpose.



NOTE: We recommend you get your own independent advice before you take any action on your block. Any action you take is strictly at your own risk.